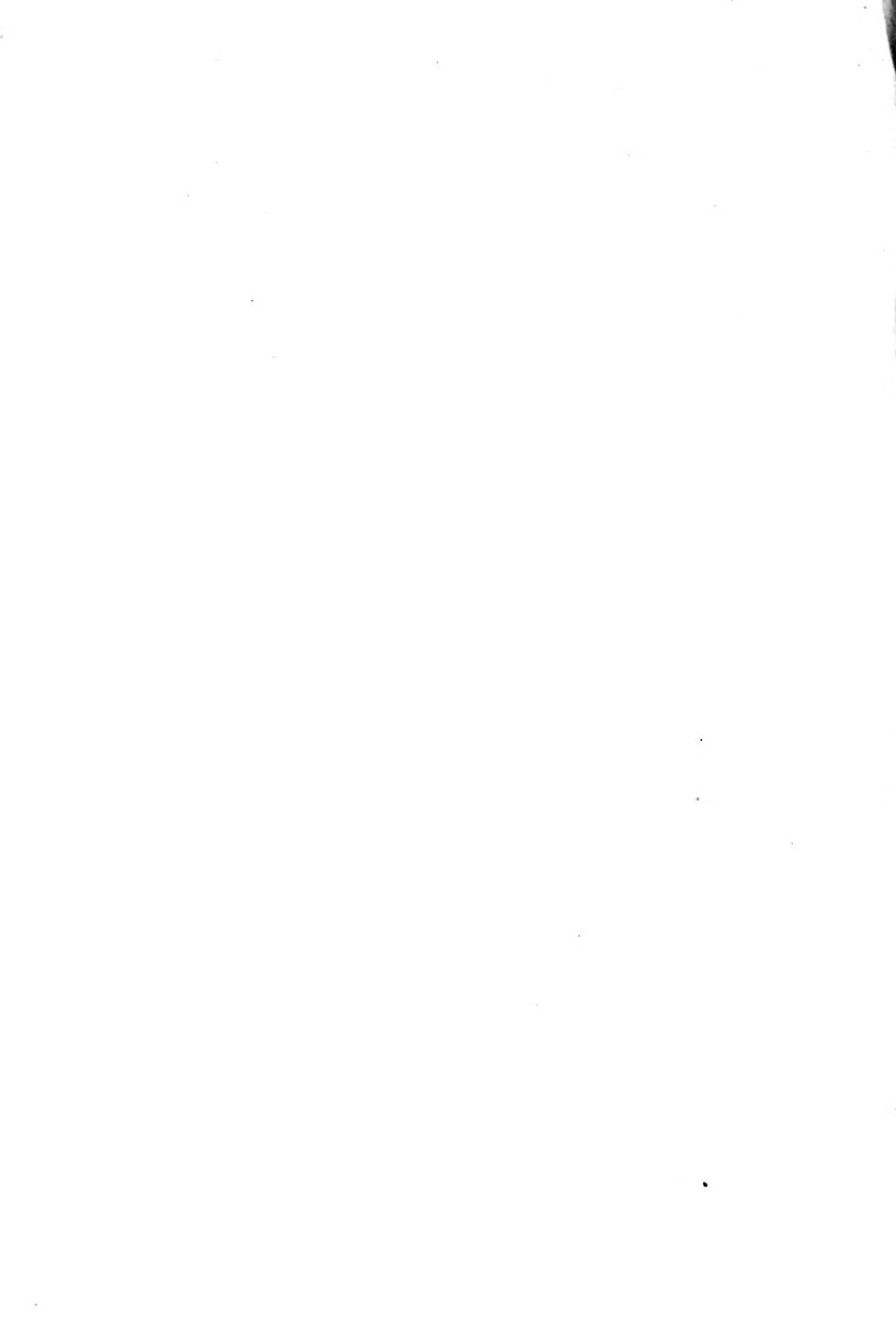




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THE
Agricultural Labourer.

BY
A FARMER'S SON.

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P R E F A C E.

THE publication of an essay on the question of the agricultural labourer has long been in contemplation by the writer of the following pages, in order to meet—though it may be only in a small degree—the unfair representations to which agriculturists have so long been subjected.

The substance of what is contained in this Essay was, in great part, written several years ago; and it has been carefully re-considered in connection with the events which have recently taken place in the agricultural world.

F. H. D.

June, 1873.



THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

IN the present day, much is said about advance, progress, and civilization. And with these ideas constantly before the mind, people are apt to indulge in a feeling of profound self-satisfaction when they read of the fallacies and false beliefs of earlier ages. And, doubtless, this is a feeling very gratifying to human vanity.

Yet, at the present time, there are multitudes of people in this country, who, with all simplicity and sincerity, are cherishing beliefs almost as baseless and absurd as some of those of earlier ages. The popular idea respecting the agricultural labourer is little better than a myth.

Nor need we wonder at the existence of false beliefs at the present time. There is nothing new under the sun, neither is there anything old. All ages have had their false beliefs, and it is not surprising that this fact is true of the nineteenth century.

But false beliefs cannot last for ever in England, any more than they could in ancient Greece or ancient Rome. It requires a hard struggle to get people to accept the truth, especially when the truth makes against their own interest, or their own self-esteem. And, in this country, such has been the feeling with regard to the land, that it

seems almost as though people would for ever close their ears against hearing the truth on agricultural questions. Still, (but, oh! how late!), people are beginning to open their eyes to the truth respecting the agricultural labourer. There are signs of hope when an advanced liberal paper says, "There are counties where the agricultural labourer can live in decency and comfort;" and when an organ specially devoted to the interests of the working classes says, "It is the opinion of the Industrial Employment Association that agricultural labourers, as a class, have the surest prospect of ultimate competence and prosperity at home and in the colonies."

The extension of education, cheap postage, the electric telegraph, even the press, and especially increased facilities for inter-communication, have done something to open men's minds to the truth on this question, and towards dispelling those grotesque ideas of rural life which have so long held possession of the public mind. There has been an intermingling of persons, and there has been an interchange of thought. Many of the agricultural population have come from the country to town; and many of the town population—such as those who formerly were shut up in towns, and often almost confined to their own streets—have gone forth and seen for themselves something of real rural life, and are beginning to learn with their eyes that which formerly their ears refused to hear, or which reached them only in its misrepresented form. The meetings of agricultural societies have greatly aided the process. And the recent movement on the part of the labourers themselves, has done more perhaps than anything else to show the falseness and absurdity of the popular views respecting the agricultural labourer.

And so, by various means, and in various ways, rays of light on this question are being diffused. Gradually the truth is forcing itself home. Still, the myth lingers, and is likely to linger—as all fallacies do—long after the general belief has passed away. But, though it lingers, it is going, and must soon be practically gone. Many old ideas have given way to new; and this old belief is giving way to a truer and a more accurate estimate of the agricultural labourer, just as the belief in witchcraft and in portents of nature, has given way to a truer and purer belief, both religious and scientific. With the advance of the knowledge of facts, the truth—the real truth—will force itself to the front, in spite of all opposition. And, if once the truth on this subject is known, the public mind will be disabused of one long-cherished error, and an act of justice will be done to the employers of agricultural labour.

The subject of the agricultural labourer has long engaged public attention; and the events of the past year have brought it forward with especial prominence. We have been constantly hearing comparisons between his position and that of other labourers, much to his disadvantage. We have been constantly hearing of the prosperity and the intelligence of the town labourer, and of the poverty and the ignorance of the agricultural labourer. The former has been held up as the embodiment of prosperity and intelligence, the latter as the embodiment of misery and stupidity. Comparisons have been drawn to show that the

position of the agricultural labourer is wretched beyond that of all others; and he himself has been represented as physically, mentally, and morally inferior to all other classes of the community; while charges, the most grave, have been brought against landlords and farmers in connection with this subject. Writers in public papers, religious teachers, platform orators, and a host of lesser magnates, have joined in the same outcry. No terms have been too strong to represent the state of the agricultural labourer as degraded and poverty-stricken; and no terms too strong to denounce those who are charged with having brought about, or at least perpetuated, this state.

But, unfortunately, only one side of this question has hitherto been heard. The press, the pulpit, and the platform, have been almost entirely in the hands of people not engaged in agriculture; and who, to say the least, have spoken with insufficient information. Except that occasionally some one has, in the face of public opinion, dared to defend the position and character of the agricultural labourer, the public discussion of this question has been carried on mainly by people who neither know the agricultural labourer nor have to pay him, and who, unhappily, have too often made it their business to be antagonistic to everything and everybody connected with the land. Agriculturists have had no chance of defending themselves, and that has been accepted as truth which has been the most loudly proclaimed.

And it is a melancholy thought that the statements made on this subject have gone forth to the whole country, and not to this country only, but to the whole world, and have been actually believed.

Now, we ask, is it right, is it just, nay, is it wise to speak on questions before investigating the facts? Surely the first thing to be done by a man who would discuss a question is to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the facts. And on agricultural questions, facts have been systematically ignored.

Now this is a question which requires to be looked at fully.

It is well known to those acquainted with the subject that agricultural affairs, to be understood, must be taken as a whole. They are unique. They stand on a basis separate and distinct from that of all others: in fact, persons not acquainted with them have not the slightest idea of them. To form a correct judgment on the question of the agricultural labourer, there are many points to be considered. To deal fairly with it, it must be looked at in all its entirety. It is not enough to quote individual cases, or the position of individual labourers; all the circumstances connected with the general subject must be taken into consideration. And the proof must be proof of its own kind. It will not do to apply commercial principles to the question: and there is nothing strange or unnatural in this. The fact is, in treating of any question, the mode of treatment must be *sui generis*. You can no more judge of agricultural questions by commercial principles, than you can judge of chemical questions by mathematical principles, or a question of religious experience by scientific principles. A mathematical question must be treated on mathematical principles, and a chemical

question on chemical principles. A mathematical proof, though perfect in its own case, would be quite useless to solve a chemical question, or a chemical proof to solve a mathematical question. Just so with agriculture—agricultural questions must be treated on agricultural principles.

We cannot admit, however, that the burden of proof on this question lies on the side of farmers; for a man is not bound to answer every charge that may be brought against him, otherwise he might be constantly engaged in rebutting charges. The *onus probandi* lies on the other side. But since these charges have been so long followed up, are still being made, and are of so serious a nature, it may be for their own satisfaction to do so; and, indeed, farmers gladly accept any opportunity of defending themselves.

Nor can we admit that we are bound to meet the demands of self-constituted judges and critics. We cannot admit that we are bound to accept their standard, any more than they are bound to accept ours. Though we assert that our standard of life for the labourer is quite as high as theirs.

Farmers are often blamed for the state of the agricultural labourer. But the fact is, it is a state which has gradually grown up in the natural course of events. It is better than preceding states; and if it is unsatisfactory, all that can be said about it is that the world has not improved so fast as we could have wished. A change has been going on in the agricultural world. This change is due to the general circumstances of the times; and the causes which have led to it have been quietly working for some years. It will go on in proportion to its own inherent life. It

needs not the assistance of agitators, nor the help of officious friends. And, on the other hand, if it has vitality, resistance will be ineffectual to stop it. Further than this, and a fact of more importance, it does not even condemn the past. Heart-burnings, recriminations, and hard speeches, are unnecessary. It is the old giving place to new—the new suited to the new circumstances in perhaps about the same degree as the old was suited to the old circumstances; but in its turn probably destined to become the old, and then give place to a future new.

Undoubtedly there is much room for improvement in the agricultural world, as in the other sections of the community. And farmers are prepared to meet the requirements of the new condition of things. But when an indictment is brought against the whole body of farmers on the ground of unsatisfactoriness in the state of the agricultural labourer, they repel the indictment. If the state has been, or is, unsatisfactory, farmers never caused it; they had not the power to alter it; they do not wish to perpetuate it; and if it is altered they will be gainers by the alteration.

The facts of the case are simply these:—In times past there was a large surplus population in the agricultural districts. These had to be provided for. Our manufacturing, commercial, and mining transactions were very limited, compared with what they now are. Emigration was availed of to a much smaller extent than at present. Consequently the surplus population was not withdrawn from the agricultural districts. The natural result was that wages were low. But on the other hand the number of labourers employed was large in proportion to the work done and to the value of the produce. In addition to this, many who were not employed had to be maintained, to a

great extent, at the expense of farmers. So that it was not a cheap state of affairs for farmers. It was not a state which they had any reason to wish to perpetuate on money grounds. The state of the labourer was the natural outcome of circumstances; and these were circumstances which, so far as regards the farmer, do not seem to be fully met by the ordinary laws of supply and demand; inasmuch as the people had to be maintained, chiefly by the land, whether they were required for labour or not. The problem which agriculturists had to solve was not a question as to what rate of wages would pay best. It was not a question which could be decided by abstract principles of political economy. The state of affairs was an absolute necessity. It may be better to pay six men twenty shillings a week each than to pay ten men twelve shillings each, but then it must be only on condition that the other four are not left to starve, but have been previously provided for.

At the present time there is great commercial prosperity. Moreover, the facilities for emigration are numerous, and are largely availed of; consequently the surplus population is drained off from the rural districts. Besides which there have been great improvements in agriculture. The natural effect of these changes is now, and may be still further in the future, an increase in the wages of agricultural labourers. But there is no reason to think that hereafter labour will be relatively more costly to farmers than it has been in the past; rather the reverse.

And this new condition of things will be decidedly better both for farmer and labourer; and the tendency of things should always be towards perfection. And the only point we urge is this, that, though this state may be better than the past, farmers could not have brought it about them-

selves. It is absolutely necessary for people to adapt themselves, to some extent, to the circumstances in which they are placed. It would be unwise to endeavour forcibly and prematurely to break through a system to which labourers have been long accustomed. It would be unwise to suddenly introduce a plan for which people are not prepared. It is better that events should be left to unfold themselves in their natural order. Indeed, a radical change in the social condition of a large body of the people, or a radical change in a long-established system, can only take place by a gradual process, and it must be the natural outcome of circumstances. When a movement for such a change does come, it is irresistible; and if allowed to work in its natural course, both employer and employed fall in with it naturally, or at least they quickly learn to adapt themselves to it.

But though the surplus population is being drawn off from the agricultural districts, and though the change which is taking place promises to produce a state better than the past, no one knows when we may have a return of the old state. And it is quite conceivable that in the future a condition of things may arise in which we may be glad to return even to the feudal or co-operative system; just as in some international disputes we have returned to the system of arbitration. We have no reason to feel sure that our national prosperity will continue for ever. We have no reason to feel sure that trade and commerce will always flourish with us. Our stores of mineral wealth may fail; and trade and commerce may desert our shores as they have deserted other countries. Should this occur, with a large population in a small country, what would become of the people? A vast body would be thrown out

of employ. Now, it is not a man's business here to amass wealth; but, at least to some extent, man is his brother's keeper, and is bound to preserve his fellow-creature from starving, if in his power to do so. But the closed factories and the deserted mines could not contribute to the support of the needy, and hence the burden would fall on the land. The people would have to be supported, chiefly by the land, either with work or else without work. The money available for their support would be limited, even though pushed to the extreme point, as it has been in the past in the case of farmers. And if a larger number have to be maintained out of the same amount of money as had formerly been divided among a smaller number, the amount for each must be less. The natural consequence would be a return of that state which has already existed, and which has been so much decried; not that the farmer wished it; not that he would be a gainer by it; not that he had wrong ideas on the subject of political economy; but because circumstances made it inevitable. If this is not likely to be the case in the future, it is possible; and at least it helps to explain the past.

After all that has been written and said on this subject; after the many and serious charges that have been made; how is it that farmers still persevere in the same course? Surely it would have been impossible for them thus to persevere year after year if the case had been as it has been represented. The answer is simple: The spirit of a man will sustain him. There is a faith which will enable a man to face the whole world; and when a man knows he's

right, you may bring a thousand charges against him, and they will not move him; if he knows that they are not founded on truth, he will be able to bear them all. Farmers have this faith. And in all life's problems the men of faith will win.

Again, if it be true that town labourers are so much better off than agricultural labourers, if it be true that they are in such a thriving condition, how is it that we hear such a continual complaint? Surely it is strange that with all their money, and all their intelligence, there is such a constant outcry, and that often for the very means of subsistence. Whence come all these murmurs which for ever fill our ears? We hear of distress, discontent, grumbling, strikes with all their attendant evils, trade disputes, ill-feeling between class and class, want of employment or employment which hardly yields the means of subsistence, and other evils. In spite of all that is said about high wages, there cannot be a doubt of the existence in our large towns of a lamentable state of destitution and poverty.

And if these people are so intelligent, how is it they have not done something better for themselves? Surely there is something wrong in the system, and agriculturists may well be on their guard against those who wish to introduce the commercial system into the agricultural districts.

In considering this question, the following points deserve notice; and they seem almost as though they must in themselves be sufficient to convince any impartial mind:

The public statements made on this subject come almost

exclusively from people unconnected with agriculture, who neither know the agricultural labourer nor have to pay him.

As these statements come chiefly from one side, the best cases of town labourers have been given, and the worst cases of agricultural labourers—the highest paid in the former case, and the lowest paid in the latter.

When people unconnected with agriculture become connected with it, and thus have a chance of seeing for themselves and of knowing the truth, they generally confess that they have been mistaken on this subject.

But there are three main points to be considered :

- (1) Money is not a perfect standard by which to estimate the position of the agricultural labourer.
- (2) The pay and position of the agricultural labourer.
- (3) The ratio of wages to profits.

Money is not a perfect standard by which to estimate the position of the agricultural labourer. And it is very necessary to insist on this point, for we are continually hearing the money wages (or the supposed money wages) of agricultural labourers compared with the money wages of other labourers, as if it were merely a question of money, and as if money had the same value everywhere.

It may be very well to refer to the money wages of the agricultural labourer, if the whole subject is understood ; but to quote those wages as a perfect index of his position can only lead to false conclusions.

Money is not, nor can it be, a perfect standard of comparison by which to judge of the relative positions of two men, except those two men live under exactly similar circumstances, and the prices of all articles for which they have to pay are the same to each. If money alone is to

be the standard of comparison, then both circumstances and prices must be the same to place two people with the same amount of money in the same position. Thus, if two men are engaged in a profession, under the same circumstances, and one makes £2,000 a year and the other £4,000, it may fairly be said that the position of the latter is twice as good as that of the former. Or, if there are two tradesmen in the same street, and in the same class of trade, and one makes £300 a year and the other £600, it may fairly be said that the position of the latter is twice as good as that of the former. Similarly, if there are two workmen living and working under similar circumstances, one earning £1 and the other £2 a week, in this case also, as in the preceding two, the relative positions may be judged of by a purely money standard, and the position of the latter may fairly be said to be twice as good as that of the former. In each of these three cases the conditions given are similar: hence the justice of the comparison on a money basis. In all three cases money is a fair standard, because the people compared live under the same circumstances. But, in cases in which the conditions are not similar, a just comparison can only be established by taking into consideration all the circumstances connected with each side, and giving a just weight to each and to all. Certainly, money is not a just and perfect standard of comparison between two classes so differently situated as town labourers and agricultural labourers. It is quite a fallacy to compare these two merely by their money wages, the whole of the circumstances under which they live are dissimilar; the whole system of town life is totally different from that of agricultural life. It is a comparison resting on a false basis.

Nor is this a principle which touches the labourer alone. It is a principle running through the whole agricultural world. Take the three classes into which the agricultural world is divided; money alone is not a just standard of their position. It is not so in the case of the landowner. The owner of land gets only a small money return for the capital invested in his land—two or three per cent., seldom so much as three and a-half per cent. The merchant and manufacturer, with their money invested in mercantile and manufacturing undertakings, reap a much high percentage, often a very much higher. Yet, taking the men of commercial interests on the one side, and landowners on the other, would anyone venture to say that the former are in any true sense better off than the latter? It is true they get more money, and for the accumulation of capital they have the advantage. And it is a fact that in the commercial world large money fortunes are made. But if money is only a means to an end, then it is doubtful whether, with all their money, they are really better off. Suppose a landed proprietor with land which produces a clear money income of £10,000 a year. Suppose also a merchant, whose business produces an income of £10,000 a year. Would anyone say that the positions of these two, even in a material point of view, are at all equal because their money incomes are the same? Look at the case. Not to speak of leisure, wide-spread influence, and numerous social advantages, the landowner has a mansion, park, and gardens at his command; he has at hand rural sports, such as riding and shooting, and many other enjoyments and pleasures. These he accepts in lieu of a larger amount of money, paying for them by the large amount of capital invested. But on the other side, if the merchant wishes to

have a country mansion and park, and to have all the pleasures of rural life for himself and family, these things will cost him a large sum of money ; and, by the time he has paid for them, he will find his £10,000 very much reduced. The landowner gets a small money return, but he gets many of those things, which, when they have to be bought directly with money, cost much ; and often, then, can be had only in a limited degree. So that, even in a money point of view, to put the merchant in a position equal to that of the landowner, he must have a much larger money income.

Thus, it is evident, that money income is not a perfect standard by which to estimate the position of the landowner.

It is not so in the case of the farmer. Farmers get very little money comparatively ; but they have many things which help to compensate them for the smallness of their money incomes. A farmer realizes only a small percentage for the money he has invested ; a good return would be ten per cent. per annum. This would be successful farming, very successful. There is such a thing as unsuccessful farming ; and, perhaps, the history of the last forty years would show that those who have lost money by farming are more numerous than those who have gained money. Tradesmen get a much larger percentage per annum, perhaps twenty or thirty per cent., or even more. But we are not to suppose that they are necessarily to that extent better off than farmers. A tradesman whose business produces an income of £600 a year is not twice as well off as a farmer with £300 a year. If both wish to live equally well, and to provide for themselves and for families equally numerous, as large a share of the necessaries, comforts,

and enjoyments of life as each other, then the difference in the end will not be so great as at first sight might appear. £600 a year is, in this case, the tradesman's income, and all of it, out of which he has to meet every expense. He gets money, and nothing but money. But the case is different with the farmer, for, irrespective of his money income, he has many things which are generally desired; which, if the tradesman has, he must pay for them in hard cash and at a high rate: and by the time he has paid for them, he will find his money income greatly reduced.

To put the case in another form:—Suppose two men, one engaged in town, the other a farmer, each with a money income of £300 a year; and that in other respects both positions were equally agreeable to each. Suppose a proposition is made by the town gentleman to the farmer to exchange positions; would any farmer accept such an offer, unless however he happened to have some special reason for doing so? The farmer might reasonably argue:—It is true that we have an income of £300 a year each. But then I have some advantages in addition to my money. I have a good house to live in; of course you would provide me with a house as good as the one I now have. I have a garden and an orchard, with abundance of fruit and vegetables; I have a supply of new-laid eggs, and some poultry; I have a cellar full of beer, and a dairy full of fresh butter, cream, and milk; I have bacon and hams, and what flour I require for my household; of course you would give me an unlimited supply of these things. Then I have a horse to ride and drive; of course you would allow me the cost of keeping a horse. And, further, I strongly object to be overlooked by other people; I have

been used to privacy ; I have fields where I can ride and walk, where my children can sport in the fresh air, among the trees and the woods, can pluck flowers, listen to the singing of birds, play at cricket and other games ; of course you would provide me with some ground, I do not ask for much, say enough for a private cricket-field ; I have all these advantages, and perhaps some other little ones besides ; give me these, then give me the £300 a year, and I will exchange with you. And the demand would be reasonable. The farmer might reasonably ask for these things, or else the money they would cost, or at least sufficient money to procure what might reasonably be accepted as an equivalent.

The case we have chosen is a favourable one on the side of the farmer. And there are doubtless some advantages on the other side. To prevent misunderstanding also, it is only right to observe, as we did in the case of the landlord, that the farmer pays for his advantages and perquisites by the large amount of capital he has invested, in comparison with the small money return he receives. And some farmers set these things at a money value, seeing that they do actually pay for them, by rent, cost of labour, and diminished income ; in which case, the advantage the farmer has, is the difference between the cost in town and the cost to him. But we are now considering only the question of money income.

People who live in towns know the cost of living. House-rent is raised to the highest point possible ; water cannot be had without paying a water-rate, and even a bunch of water-cress or a cup of milk must be paid for by a direct payment in hard cash. If people in towns got only the same amount of money as farmers do, so far from

amassing large fortunes, they would be at their wits' ends to know how to make both ends meet. Tradesmen make larger money profits than farmers do; and it is reasonable that they should, because they get nothing but money, and the relations of town life are entirely monetary. A farmer gets less money, but then he gets many things which, when they have to be bought with money, cost much. There seems to be a kind of law of compensation, so that one side have those things which they have not the money to purchase, and the other side have the money to purchase those things which they would not otherwise have.

Doubtless town life has its advantages; but in many cases their exclusiveness is passing away, and they are becoming more and more extended to the agricultural world. In particular, as in the former case, the one great advantage which the man in trade has over the farmer, is the opportunity of accumulating capital. He has the money; he may accumulate it; for the accumulation of capital he has a chance which the farmer has not. And as a fact, it is well known that tradesmen do amass much larger fortunes than farmers, and that often when starting with a much smaller capital. This may seem a little unequal. But it is to be hoped that the time will never come, when it will be the practice to amass large money fortunes out of the production of the bread and meat which are to feed the people. Though, unhappily, the course of events, and particularly the action of "the working men" and their "friends," is tending to produce this, by throwing everything into the hands of the rich, and by causing everything to be estimated by money; and thus rendering it incumbent on people who wish to hold their own and who desire to be treated with respect, to amass wealth.

In talking these questions over with a farmer, after having spoken on various points, and particularly of the fact that many people get so much more money than farmers, he concluded with these words, which appeared to the writer of this essay to be a very fair summing up of the case, "'Tisn't the money you get, 'tis how you can live."

To maintain people in towns in a position as good as that of farmers, they must have larger money incomes.

Thus it is evident that money income is not a perfect standard by which to estimate the position of the farmer.

Lastly, it is not so in the case of the labourer. Just as it has been shown that money income does not fairly represent the position of the owner and occupier of land, so also it can be shown that it does not fairly represent the position of the labourer. The principle is a general one, running through the whole agricultural world. It is not doubtful, it is as applicable to the labourer as to the two other cases. 'Tis true, the labourer gets but little money; but then the farmer gets but little; and the landlord gets but little; in fact, in the agricultural world, no one gets much money; but all have their perquisites in kind, which are some compensation. And the same influences as those which increased the relative cost of town living in the preceding cases, affect also the labourer. Therefore to place the town labourer in as good a position as the agricultural labourer, he must have as much money as the agricultural labourer, *plus* sufficient to meet this increased cost. If an agricultural labourer were about to exchange his situation for one in town, he might reasonably ask, not simply how much greater the amount of money would be; but, whether under the circumstances, it would

provide for him as large a supply of the necessities, comforts, and enjoyments of life as he gets in his present position. For in this, as in the preceding case, "'Tisn't the money you get, 'tis how you can live." Whether a man gets ten shillings a week, or ten pounds, or only ten pence, the real question is,—In what position will that money maintain him? Whatever money he may have, if the sum will not procure for him as much good food, pure air, healthy recreation, social intercourse, leisure and opportunity for physical, mental, and moral improvement, as another labourer enjoys, then undoubtedly he is in a worse position, even though he may have more money. In such a case, the nominal amount of the money received is comparatively nothing, the actual condition in which the man is maintained is everything. If two people have an article equally good, then in that particular they are equally well off, though, owing to local differences, the nominal value in one case may be considerably higher than in the other. If they have as good a house, as good a living, and all things equally good and equally abundant, then they are in all respects equally well off.

The fact is, money is not really wealth, it is only a representative of wealth, used for convenience,—to facilitate the interchange of commodities, and to enable different people to devote themselves to different pursuits—specialities, rather than that each should have to produce for himself everything he requires. This process is according to a natural tendency, and is found to be advantageous both to individuals and to the general community. But it would be a great mistake to look upon money as itself wealth. It is only a representative of wealth, and even in that capacity is far from a perfect or complete standard.

And if you attribute to money a value which does not belong to it, any argument based on this assumption is necessarily worthless.

Who knows the value of money? It is not of the same value at all times. Its value or purchasing power is constantly changing, generally decreasing. Blackstone, writing more than a hundred years ago, when speaking of the statute 8 Hen. VI. c. 7 (1430), by which it was enacted that knights of the shire shall be elected by men of the county having freehold property of the value of forty shillings a year, says, "This freehold must be of forty shillings annual value; because that sum would then, with proper industry, furnish all the necessaries of life, and render the freeholder, if he pleased, an independent man. For Bishop Fleetwood in his *Chronicon Preciosum*, written at the beginning of the present century, has fully proved forty shillings in the reign of Hen. VI. to have been equal to twelve pounds per annum in the reign of Queen Anne; and, as the value of money is very considerably lowered since the Bishop wrote, I think we may fairly conclude, from this and other circumstances, that what was equivalent to twelve pounds in his days is equivalent to twenty at present." It is universally admitted that difference of time makes a difference in the value of money. But if difference of time makes a difference in the value of money, we ask (and surely it is a reasonable question)—May not difference of circumstances at the same time also make a difference in the value of money?

Again, it has never yet been conceded that money is the only indication of wealth, or that everything ought to be judged of by a money standard. There was a time when a man's wealth was estimated by his flocks and his

herds more than by his money. There was even a time when there was no money at all. And at the present day the money of some nations would be worthless in England. How fallacious then to make money the only standard of wealth. Surely the most ardent advocate of the money principle must admit that at least money is not the only wealth, that there is other wealth besides money. Why should money be reckoned as the only wealth? It is only useful as it circulates. If the circulation should stop, what would those do who depend for their subsistence on the regular receipt of money?

Money is a good slave, but a bad master. It is of immense use. And though things usually find some kind of money level, let those who seem incapable of appreciating anything but money remember that after all there is something more valuable than money—life, health, abundance of good food, pure air, mutual intercourse with fellow-creatures, a cheerful heart, and a joyous spirit, are not things to be despised. And to a labourer a lack of these things is not compensated for by a few extra shillings weekly. And possibly the truest view of life, so far as relates to the question under consideration, is—To provide for all as much as possible of those things which are really for man's advantage, to aid in his development physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

We will now look more particularly into the question of the pay and position of the agricultural labourer.

As before stated the actual condition is the only true test—the only true standard of the position of the agri-

cultural labourer. And this is a question of fact, not of sentiment. On this point farmers fear no investigation. They invite investigation. They wish the truth to be known, and hitherto it has been hidden or stifled. If those who talk so much and so strongly about what they term the wretched condition of the agricultural labourer, would come and see for themselves, they would find that facts do not agree with their theories. Indeed, on agricultural questions the party of advance are an age behind the times, and their much boasted intelligence would appear to consist of a non-acquaintance with facts. Perhaps after all it may be found that a clear understanding and a thorough acquaintance with facts constitute the truest intelligence.

The question of the pay and position of the agricultural labourer embraces many points. Hitherto in dealing with this question people have been content to look merely at the amount of money paid, (which, however, was often only the amount thought to be paid,) without regarding circumstances. Further, these statements having come almost entirely from one side, the best cases of the town labourer have been contrasted with the worst cases of the agricultural labourer ; which is manifestly unjust. Such a course would be unjust in any case ; but it is especially so in the case of the agricultural labourer, for money income alone, even when correctly stated, is not a just standard by which to estimate his position.

It would not be easy to make any exact statement suitable to all cases. The wages and earnings of agricultural labourers differ considerably in different parts of the country, and to different men in the same parts ; moreover, local customs vary much, and in some districts the plan of payment in kind is kept up to a much greater

extent than in others. Then there are two distinct classes of labourers—hired labourers and labourers who are not hired. Some men, as for example carters, cowmen, and shepherds, are hired by the year. The work of these is of a definite character, and their weekly pay is fixed and certain. But even these usually get something in addition to their weekly wages, as at Michaelmas two or three pounds—sometimes more. On various occasions they get extra money; and it is they who chiefly benefit by perquisites. Other labours are not hired. These come in for more piece work. And a good workman may often get more money by this plan than by becoming a hired servant. As far as practicable, it is a plan satisfactory both to farmer and labourer. But obviously it has its disadvantages for the labourer; and it is not universally applicable.

If we look only at the actual money payments, even in this particular the case has been unfairly stated. The 9s. or 10s. a week so much spoken of is not a fair statement of the case. And 12s. or 13s., or even 14s. or 15s., often falls short of the mark. It is not easy to get exact statistics respecting the pay of agricultural labourers. There is no knowing what they do get. Farmers themselves would often be surprised to see the total amount; for there are few, if any, farmers who have been in the habit of keeping a strict account of the actual amount of money paid to each labourer. The amount is much larger than it is usually thought. And certainly the public have been hearing only the very minimum. We cannot refrain from noticing such instances as the following :—

A man reaping corn can earn 6s. or 8s. a day.
 „ mowing grass „ 5s. or 6s. „
 „ hoeing beans, turnips, etc.
 can earn 2s. 6d. or 3s. „

Then there are thatchers, and hay-tiers, and sheep-shearers, all of whom can earn 4s. or 5s., a day. There are hedge-cutters, and men engaged in under-draining, and men who thrash in the barn, who can earn at least 2s. 6d. a day.

And the operations done by piece-work take up nearly six months of the year.

Besides these there are men who go with machines, for which they get 2s. 6d. a day, and food and beer. And there are various other special operations and special payments.

And we cannot refrain from drawing a contrast between the position of these men, and that of many labourers in large towns who get only 15s. or 16s. a week. On the subject of clerks with fifty pounds a year we will not dwell.

But money is not the only point to be looked at. Like other classes connected with the land, agricultural labourers get what are termed “perquisites;” and they get many things at a cost which is very small when compared with what people in the large towns have to pay for them; besides which they have some natural advantages which cannot be had in towns. And to meet the case of other labourers, or to form a just comparison, these perquisites and advantages must not be estimated at the trifling sum of money they are said to be worth in the rural districts, as is usually done. To place a town labourer in as good

a position as an agricultural labourer in these respects, he must have sufficient money to buy them, irrespective of what they may cost. The only equivalent for them to the town labourer is, not the amount of money they cost the agricultural labourer, but either the things themselves, or else sufficient money to procure them ; or at least something which might reasonably be accepted in lieu thereof.

The perquisites are sometimes of considerable value, though perhaps not usually so. Like wages, they vary in different parts of the country : and they continue by the perpetuation of customs which have come down from time immemorial. The labourers have been accustomed to them, and are often very much averse to any change of system. Though it would certainly make farmers appear in a more favourable light if perquisites were commuted for money payments. Such a process is going on ; many are desirous to extend it ; but it is one which ought not to be ruthlessly thrust upon people before they are prepared for it.

But even if there were no perquisites, there would still remain the fact, a fact which is of far greater importance, that the general circumstances and the general condition of things, under which the agricultural labourer lives, are very different from the circumstances and the condition of things under which the labourer in a large town lives ; so that 15s. a week to an agricultural labourer is quite a different thing to 15s. a week to a labourer living in a large town. The two sums represent quite different values in the two cases, although nominally the same. Look at a few of the facts of the case :—

House rent is much higher in large towns than in rural parts. We will for the moment take it for granted that the pay of the town labourer is higher than that of the

agricultural labourer. And we will take as an example of each an agricultural labourer with 16s. a week and a town labourer with 20s. a week. Now the agricultural labourer gets a house and garden to himself; and for this he pays a weekly rent of about 1s. 6d. or at most 2s. The town labourer could not, as a rule, get such a house and garden at all. He might, however, obtain a house which, under the circumstances, might fairly be accepted as an equivalent. But this would cost 8s. or 10s. a week. Not to put it too high, say only 6s. His income would thus be reduced to 14s. a week, *i.e.*, he would have a house and 14s. a week; while the agricultural labourer would have a house at least as good, and 14s. a week also. Thus by this one item the money wages would be reduced to an equality. And there are other items to be considered. And the case is still worse when we remember that there are many, very many, labourers in towns who do not get 20s. a week. Nor will it do to say he need not have so expensive a house, unless however it can be shown that a house as good as the one we have supposed can be had for less money; otherwise you might as well say that he need not have as good food or as good clothing as the agricultural labourer. But, if he has a right to expect as good, then to put him in as good a position he must have things as good, irrespective of the money they may cost. And if he cannot get as good, then that very fact shows that he is worse off, however much more money he may get.

We are however far from saying that there is no room for improvement in the houses of agricultural labourers.

Again, most provisions, notably the first necessities of life, reach the town labourer after passing through the hands of several people, all of whom have to make some

profit. Many things which the agricultural labourer has first hand, and therefore fresher and purer and less costly, come to him at an enhanced price, less fresh, and sometimes adulterated.

Then, in large towns a vitiated atmosphere produces exhaustion, both physical and mental; and this renders necessary a larger amount of nourishment, or else stimulants, to support the system. And medicine is constantly required to counteract the evils induced by this state.

In fact the high wages so much boasted of are in very many cases a farce; for if a shilling is put into one pocket, fifteen pence is taken out of the other.

Further, if other labourers get more money, they do more work for it, and their work is often of a less agreeable character. Not to speak of the many people who in shops work on regularly to eight or nine o'clock at night, sometimes till twelve o'clock, and occasionally even later; there are vast numbers of labourers whose regular hours are from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., whereas, except in special cases and at special seasons of the year, the usual hours of attendance of agricultural labourers, at least in some parts of the country, are from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Besides this, the work in a factory and in many other departments, is as regular as machine work. And the amount that is accomplished by a labourer is enormous. If it were possible for agricultural labourers to accomplish as much work as this, farmers would even now be able to pay them higher wages; and increased profits would probably soon enable them to make a still further increase of pay.

But the question is one of wider range than we have yet taken. Life to be truly blessed must be something more than a mere vegetable existence. In estimating a man's

position, we ought to regard not only his material circumstances, but also everything which tends to make life happy. A man ought to have some enjoyments, and some recreations, to prevent his falling into a state of despair ; and since the natural enjoyments which are had in the country are not natural in towns, to place town labourers in a position equal to that of agricultural labourers, such ought to be provided for them, or else they ought to have money over and above what agricultural labourers have, sufficient to procure such enjoyments for themselves, or at least something which might reasonably be accepted as an equivalent.

And the worst feature of all in the case of the lower classes of the town population is the utter absence of all joy. A man is employed for long hours, in dingy places, in a poisonous atmosphere, at dull, monotonous work, often calling forth hardly a spark of intelligence after the first effort. When his work is over and he returns home, it is to some back street, to a dismal house which may be the abode of several families. He has not a garden to himself. He has no healthy amusements or pleasant recreations. He has not the chance to stroll in the green fields ; to listen to the singing of birds ; to see nature in all its freshness and glory ; and to draw in the pure air of heaven, and with it health and contentment. No wonder that his leisure time is often spent in grumbling over real or fancied social and political grievances. A strange contrast this to the agricultural labourer as he shouts the harvest home.

Then there is a total separation between employer and employed, between rich and poor. An employer takes on so many hands, at market price ; they work, he pays them. The transaction is purely commercial. Employer and employed live in separate districts. There is little or no

personal knowledge of each other. There is no freedom of intercourse ; but a total separation.

But the case is very different with the farm labourer. He is engaged on work which often tests his skill, and calls forth judgment and insight ; and though some of it is rough, much is pleasant. His occupation is among the ever-varying scenes of nature—scenes the very thought of which calls up before the mind pictures of loveliness, and sends a thrill of joy through the soul. At the close of his day's work he has a home of his own to go to, with the evening before him ; and, at least in the summer season, the means of enjoyment at hand. To one who has been witnessing the teeming masses in the dingy, crowded streets of a large town, it is cheering, on passing into the country, to see the labourers in their gardens, to watch the sports on the village green, or to listen while for miles round the heavens echo with their joyous shouts.

For all disadvantages there ought to be some compensation. If a man is to be stifled and poisoned in a foul atmosphere, he ought to have some compensation. So, also, if a man is to go down in a coal mine, with a chance of being crushed to death, buried alive, or blown up by an explosion, he ought to have something for the risk. Or, if a man goes to sea and endures the hardships and dangers of a seafaring life, surely he ought to have some special reward.

Thus, to place other labourers in as good a position as agricultural labourers, they must be paid as much money ; and over and above this, sufficient to meet all extra expenses, to provide some enjoyments, and to compensate for disadvantages ; and when this has been done, they are

in a position equal to, but not better than, that of agricultural labourers.

Finally, on this point: while it is true that many town labourers get high wages, it is also true that many get very moderate, or even low wages; and there are many of the town population who get no wages at all, but are in a state of destitution, and rise in the morning not knowing where they can get a morsel of bread for breakfast. Many of the labourers who are in actual employment get only 17s. or 18s. a week, some even less than that, and there are vast numbers with only a pound or a guinea a week. On the other hand, while the money wages of the ordinary agricultural labourer appear low, there are in the rural districts such men as blacksmiths, carpenters, harness makers, bricklayers, and perhaps others, who, though not exactly in the ordinary acceptation of the term agricultural labourers, are employed and paid almost entirely by farmers, and in work absolutely necessary for farming operations; and might fairly be called skilled agricultural labourers, though, in fact, a great deal of farm labour is skilled labour: and these earn more money than the pay of ordinary agricultural labourers. So that, beginning and going through the whole of the strata of those who are employed and paid by agriculturists for agricultural purposes, and the whole of the strata of labouring classes in other departments, it is by no means certain on which side the average pay is higher. If we take on the one side only agricultural labourers pure and simple in the ordinary acceptation of the term; and, on the other side, only those who have regular and definite employment, both skilled and unskilled labourers, the average amount of wages would probably be higher in the case of

the town labourers; though this has not yet been proved. But, if we grant this, if we grant that their wages are higher, it by no means follows that they are of necessity better off. For, if they get more money, they get nothing but money, and everything they have has to be paid for in hard cash; they have many expenses extra to those of agricultural labourers; many things, notably the first necessities of life, have to be bought at greatly enhanced prices, coming to them after several people have made a profit out of them; and they are placed at some natural disadvantages affecting their material well-being. So that possibly the extra amount of money they receive (if indeed they do receive more money), may not be sufficient to meet the extra expenses which must necessarily be incurred to maintain themselves in a position only as good as that of agricultural labourers.

We cannot, however, draw a comparison with mathematical exactness. The facts are at present but very imperfectly known; and much always depends on personal taste, and on private and individual circumstances. But, looking at all the points we have had under consideration, there seems strong ground for the conclusion, that, to say the least, the position of the agricultural labourer is not so much worse than that of other labourers as it has been represented.

Undoubtedly, among agricultural labourers there are bad cases—cases of great poverty. But this is not peculiar to the agricultural world. Want and poverty exist elsewhere, even in America—the land “where plenty reigns.” And there is no reason to suppose that the case is worse among agricultural labourers than among some other sections of the community—possibly the reverse. As a rule, it may

be said, that, in most classes, if a man marries young, and has a large family, he will have a struggle to live respectably and make both ends meet; and it is strange indeed that people should require that one exception to this general law of society should be made in favour of agricultural labourers. Undoubtedly an agricultural labourer with a wife and a large family of young children is badly off. But so are most other people so circumstanced. A man cannot have his wealth or his pleasures in two ways; and it is certain that if a man is rich in children, then he cannot have the money which is necessarily spent in their maintenance. Though, possibly, such a man may make a good bargain.

But there is another side to this question. When children grow up, they become a source of help; and instead of speaking of an agricultural labourer, his wife and six children living on nine shillings a week, it would often be much nearer the mark to speak of them as living on £100 a year.

Complaint is often made that the agricultural labourer has no chance of rising in the world. But, rightly looked at, the agricultural labourer has chances of rising the same as other people have. Take a case: say a porter with 18s. a week; as long as he remains a porter with 18s. a week he does not rise; but if he gets into a higher position, he does rise. Just so with the agricultural labourer; as long as he remains an agricultural labourer with 12s., 16s., or 20s. a week, as the case may be, he does not rise; but, if by industry, thrift, or other means, he gets into a higher position, then he does rise. There is no barrier; the field is as fair and open to him as to other people. We grant that the agricultural world does not offer so many of those

higher positions, or so many chances of rising, as the commercial world does. But this arises from the nature of things. It is merely a fact, just as it is a fact that Russia is larger than England. But no praise is due to the Russians, nor is any dishonour due to the English, on this account. It is simply a fact. It reflects neither honour nor dishonour on either party. But if there are more prizes in the commercial world, we must remember that there are also more blanks. And, further, it is worthy of notice how many people who have risen to real eminence by merit have laboured on the land.

One thing more. It is a fact beyond all contradiction that, as a general rule, even without moving into another sphere, every agricultural labourer has a chance of becoming a substantial capitalist at the age of 25 or 30 years ; and this he might do with far more ease than many clerks, shopmen, and others could do the same thing. For an agricultural labourer starting on his own account, (say) at the age of 18 years, might, if he wished, very well save in very many cases at least 5s. a week, if he were to continue single, and be steady, industrious, and thrifty. And these are the common conditions which have to be complied with by most people who seek to rise in the world.

It is often represented that there is no such thing as conference between farmers and their men. But this is totally a mistake. There is a conference weekly, and a more formal conference annually. But in addition to this, and of more importance, there is a continuous conference ; there is a constant intermingling—an almost daily conference. There is freedom of intercourse. The farmer knows his men personally ; he goes among them, and talks with them. And it is a point of the very first importance

that there should be sympathy between employer and employed ; and no amount of extra money can compensate for the lack of it. Where it exists there will be many little acts of kindness on both sides, tending to bind together, but which cannot well be put down in writing. There has been much sneering at the state of the agricultural labourer as one of semi-feudal subservience. As though the normal condition were a state of antagonism ; as though for a man to show an interest in his master's affairs were a thing to be ashamed of. But there is nothing to sneer at in a man looking after his master's interest. There is nothing to sneer at in a man doing a good day's work. There is nothing to sneer at even in a man being content with his wages. The relations between master and man ought to be something closer and purer than can be established by money. Though a man be the poorest hedger and ditcher in the land, he's a man and a brother, of the same flesh and blood as other people, and perhaps with feelings and sensibilities as acute as those of many who speak of him with contempt.

Now let us look at the question of the ratio of wages to profits, or what portion of the profits of the capitalist falls to the share of the labourer.

And this is a very important consideration, because it is some indication of how near the employer and employed are together ; and whether the labourer is receiving a fair

share of the profits he helps to create. And it is a question of wide application; for it is not often that a man attains to wealth by his own unaided efforts, it is usually with the aid of the brains and sinews of other people. Men, almost without exception, recognize a necessity that there must be difference of position and distinctions of office in order to carry on the business of life. But let there be a sympathy of feeling and a community of interest, and these distinctions are not felt to be grievances. Even many of those who speak so much of the wretched condition of the agricultural labourer, have their own servants and their own labourers. And the difference between their case and that of agriculturists, is, that the gulf of separation between them and their labourers is wider than that between farmers and agricultural labourers. The evil (if evil it be) which is complained of in the agricultural world, exists in an intensified degree among those very people who complain of it.

In an army of soldiers there must be distinctions—officers and men. But this is no grievance. The soldiers of Hannibal will follow their leader over the Alps, and up and down Italy, through hardships, privations, and war, faithful unto death, when they see that he, their leader is with them, enduring the same hardships, bearing the same privations, sharing the same lot. The soldiers of Napoleon will follow him through years of strife and conflict, when fired with enthusiasm for their leader, feeling his presence among them. But the soldiers of Hannibal, and the soldiers of Napoleon would not have done thus, had their leaders lived apart from them in luxury and pleasure. The result of such separation and distinction would have been envy and dissatisfaction. Without enthusiasm, more or less, not much that is great or good will be done in the world.

Without enthusiasm, a man will do little good for his employer, and still less for himself. Happily something of this feeling has existed among agricultural labourers; happily something of this feeling still exists among them. And this feeling is absolutely necessary to carry on the work of agriculture with any degree of satisfaction either to master or man.

The question of the ratio of wages to profits is, then, an important one.

Let us look at a few figures. This is perhaps a favourable place to observe, as bearing on this and on some other parts of this essay, that it is not possible to give any exact statement on all points universally applicable, or which would be accepted by all farmers. The results of farming operations always depend to a great extent on the skill and industry of the individual farmer; and not a little on the question whether the rent is high or not. Besides which different farmers have different ways of reckoning.

Take a case like this: a farmer starts on a farm of 200 acres with a capital of £2000, and realizes £10 per cent. for his money, or an income of £200 a year. This would be successful farming, very successful; and, as already noticed, there is such a thing as unsuccessful farming. Now farming is not absolute security for money; and a person could easily invest his money with security equal to that of farming, so as to obtain at least $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. per annum interest. He could get 5 per cent. with absolute security, or he might invest it otherwise and get much more than $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. But we will take $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. as a fair interest with security about as good as that of farming. A person thus investing £2000, would have an income of £150 a year, with nothing to do for it. His whole time would therefore be at his own disposal, either for leisure,

or for some other kind of occupation; while the farmer would get £150 interest for his money, and an additional £50 a year for his own labours. And considering that the farmer has to devote his whole time to the work; that he has the whole responsibility; has to superintend everything; has to do all buying and selling; that his judgment is constantly called into exercise; that he has continual care and thought, day and night, 7 days a week, and 52 weeks in the year, surely £50 a year is not too much for his work. If a tradesman were to establish a business with a capital of £2000, he would expect a much larger income than £200 a year from it; and if he were to appoint someone to manage it, with sole responsibility, he would never think of offering so small a sum as £50 a year as payment to the manager.

To carry this consideration further, a labourer on such a farm could very well earn 16s. a week, or £40 a year. And, certainly, if there is to be any distinction between master and man, £10 a year is not too much to mark it.

Again, omitting exceptional cases and exceptional seasons, the farmer is thinking and working both earlier and later than the labourer; in fact, as before stated, his care and thought are constant and unceasing; so that the sum per hour the farmer would receive for his own work, would be positively less than the sum per hour he pays to his men.

And this is a specimen of successful farming.

Further, if on such a farm as we have supposed only five men were constantly employed; and if their wages were suddenly and under existing circumstances to be increased 4s. a week each—say from 16s. to 20s.—the total extra payment would amount to £1 a week or £52 a year. Thus the farmer would be left without a single penny for

his own labours. His capital he might have invested, and without any greater risk, have realized at least as much interest as his farm pays him, and he would then have had the whole of his time to himself. We may well ask, who would long continue to till the land under such conditions?

Once more, suppose the annual gross produce of a farm is sold on an average for £1,200. The cost of labour on such a farm may be estimated at £400 a year at least, *i.e.*, £33 per cent., or one-third of the value of the total gross produce. And this paid punctually and without fail every week, and before every other payment—even the rent. Of course no exact statement, suitable to all cases, can be made; sometimes the ratio would be higher than this, and in some favourable instances it might fall as low as twenty-five per cent., or one-fourth of the gross produce.

Finally, some notice should be taken of the fact that farmers pay large sums to the poor rates. A farmer with 300 acres of land, in some cases pays, in addition to wages, as much as £60 a year poor rates. This money forms a kind of sick, benefit, and superannuation fund for the sick, the destitute, and the aged—a costly and inefficient system it is true, but still a system which entails great burdens on the land. Now this means that if there were no poor rates to be paid, the farmer, in the case we have supposed, could afford to pay to each of ten men 2s. 6d. a week all the year round more than he now pays them. £60 a year on such a farm may be an extreme case. But what a well-conducted benefit society would do for members paying a sum much less than 2s. 6d. a week each, is a question worthy of consideration.

The subject of poor rates is one to which farmers will do well to continue to direct their attention.

It may be that labour, generally, has been underpaid ; but there seems reason to believe that if it were admitted as a principle that the labourer should be paid in proportion to the profits made, either many other employers would have to increase very largely the wages of their labourers, or farmers would have to decrease theirs.

There are a few other points to be considered.

Of those who complain of the wages of agricultural labourers we would ask—How much would you pay them ? To all things in this world there must be a limit ; and wages cannot permanently exceed the profits made. If I undertake to do a piece of work for 40s. and if, besides working myself, I employ two men to help me, I cannot very well afford to pay them more than 20s. each. Just so with the farmer : the pay of the labourers cannot permanently exceed, or even equal, the total profits of the farm. If a labourer is to be paid for his labours, so must the farmer ; and there are few farmers who, at the best, get more than a small per centage for their money, and a small sum for their own labours.

If the manufacturer pays higher wages than the farmer, it is because he makes higher profits, and labour of the description he requires is more scarce. Let these conditions fail, and the higher wages will fail also.

Agricultural labour has been most costly, only farmers have not appeared to advantage.

Agricultural labourers are better off in England than in most other countries.

The wages of agricultural labourers have greatly increased of late years.

Agricultural labour is more liberally paid for than many other kinds of labour. A farmer says :—" At the beginning of last harvest I sent my men one morning to peck a piece of peas. I agreed with them for the price. They asked me for beer, which I gave them. About five o'clock in the afternoon they came to the house to say they had finished the job, and to know what they were to go on with the next morning. I had just made out the account ; and found that one man and his wife had earned 9s. 5d., another 8s. 4d., and so on in proportion. Shortly after a carpenter, who had been at work on the farm that day, came to the house for his day's pay—3s. 6d. I was forcibly struck with the contrast between the farm labourer and the tradesman in their earnings."

Mr. Brassey in his book on "Work and Wages," says—"I maintain, unhesitatingly, that daily wages are no criterion of the actual cost of executing works, or of carrying out manufacturing operations. On the contrary, experience teaches that there is a most remarkable tendency to equality in the actual cost of work throughout the world." Again, "In point of fact, the amount of daily wages affords no real measure of the actual cost of work ; and it is quite possible that work may be more cheaply executed by the same workmen, notwithstanding that their wages have largely increased." And again, "The condition of the Warwickshire labourer has of late been brought prominently under the notice of the public. The internal economy of the agricultural labourer's household has been minutely described in the columns of the 'Daily News.' I would ask men of business to examine

this question, not from a philanthropic point of view, but for the purpose of ascertaining what rate of wages will give the best return to employers. It is quite true that the rent received by the English landlord gives a miserable return on the capital value of his property. In no country indeed does landed property give so poor a return. It is equally certain that the business of farmers is not as lucrative as that of manufacturers. If the agricultural labourer receives higher wages without doing more work in the day, the farmer and landlord will suffer a diminution of income, which they can ill afford to bear; and the only result will be that capital will be withdrawn from agriculture, and more advantageously invested in other business. But are we justified in assuming that the labourer is incapable of doing more work. I will not be so presumptuous as to offer an opinion upon the particular case of the Warwickshire labourers; but this I say, that all experience shows that, with proper supervision, and with an equitable scheme of prices for piece-work, the best paid workman does more work for a given sum of money than the under-paid, and therefore under-fed, labourer can possibly accomplish. The cost of labour, rightly observes Mr. Fawcett, 'is determined by the amount of work which is really done for the wages. Many of our labourers can barely obtain the necessaries of life; and we can all appreciate the false economy that would be practised if a horse was so much stinted of food that he could only do half as much work as he would be able to perform if he were properly fed.' High wages do not necessarily imply dear labour, just as on the other hand low wages do not of necessity make labour cheap. On my father's extensive contracts, carried on in almost every quarter of the globe, the daily wage of the labourer

was fixed at widely different rates; but it was found to be the almost invariable rule that the cost of labour was the same—that for the same sum of money the same amount of work was everywhere performed. Superior skill, extra diligence, and a larger development of physical power, will often compensate the employer who finds himself obliged to pay higher wages than his competitors.”

In these remarks Mr. Brassey states his conviction that the cost of work cannot be determined by the rate of daily wages; that high wages do not necessarily imply dear labour, and low wages do not of necessity make labour cheap. Perhaps this fact has never before been so clearly brought out and so forcibly exemplified. It is true of agriculture as well as of railway construction. But it is only applicable to those agricultural operations in which work can be done by the piece. One example only will we give:—A farmer says, “I had a piece of beans hoed by the acre. The men earned a little over 2s. 6d. a day. The second hoeing I had done by the day. I gave them 2s. per day. It then cost me quite double what the first hoeing did.”

It is gratifying to find the experience of farmers in this respect borne out by an authority so high and so influential as Mr. Brassey, and given to the world in a work commanding so much notice. And farmers are indebted to Mr. Brassey for his testimony, which, though not in all respects applicable to agriculture, must have a wholesome effect in creating a more correct public opinion.

Farmers have nothing to fear, in a pecuniary point of view, from the movement now going on among agricultural labourers. They cannot be losers by it. They may be the first sufferers, and some of them may be ruined. They

may suffer for a time, but in the long run they cannot suffer from it.

The cultivation of the land must be made to pay, or people will not cultivate it. But the land must be cultivated. This is a necessity. For after all that may be said about trade, commerce, manufactures, mineral wealth, science, art, and literature, the great occupation of life is to sustain life,—the chief work of life is the struggle for existence; and the means of sustenance must come mainly from the land. There is a certain amount of wages which farmers can pay now. There will probably be a certain natural increase which they can afford. There may be modifications and improvements which will still further enable them to increase wages. But anything beyond this must be paid for by the general public in an increased price of provisions. If labour is made more costly, other people must pay for it.

There are numerous ways in which farmers may be recouped for any extra wages they may have to pay; so that though wages may be higher, labour will not be relatively more costly than at present. And under existing circumstances this will be absolutely necessary; for farmers have only a limited sum of money which they can possibly pay away for labour, even though the amount be stretched to the utmost limit, as it has been in the past. In case of a general emergency, farmers have many resources. Hitherto, at the cost of much money, they have not availed themselves of these resources to the fullest extent. Had they done so, many labourers would have been thrown out of employ, and others would have suffered to a greater or less degree.

A movement among the labourers will give farmers an

opportunity of using machinery to a greater extent. And machinery has some advantages. For example, in the case of reaping and mowing, as machinery does the work more quickly, it gives a better chance of escaping bad weather. And farmers, acting on the strictly profit and loss principle, would gain much by more fully adopting this mode of reaping and mowing. But hitherto they have only partially availed themselves of machinery; and this in many cases, not because farmers are slow to adopt improvements, but on the principle that a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, because local feeling was against it. Local feeling, like public opinion, must be respected, at least to some extent. But should there be a general strike among agricultural labourers, that would give an opportunity, and perhaps force a necessity of making use of machinery to a greater extent.

Again, farmers have been in the habit of employing, at times, more labourers than they have actually required. When men could have been dispensed with, they have been kept on, simply for the sake of giving them employment.

Another consideration is this: If labourers get more money, they will spend more. But if a man has an extra coat during the year, that cannot injure the farmer, for the farmer supplies the wool; similarly with other articles, if a man wears better boots, the farmer supplies the skin for the leather; if he eats more meat, the farmer supplies it; if he has more or better beer, the farmer grows the barley which makes the malt. Thus, as one farmer said to the writer, "A farmer is the last man who need want to starve people."

There are other ways in which farmers might be

recouped; some of which, however, are better left unsaid.

It should be noticed also that increased wages to the labourer are usually preceded by increased profits to the capitalist. And further, events have clearly proved that in the disputes which have taken place between labour and capital, capital has got the best of it: labourers by their agitations have done more good to their employers than to themselves, *i.e.*, if putting more money into their pockets is doing them good; and similar disputes in the agricultural world could only end by putting money into the pockets of farmers. It is lamentable to think how the question of the agricultural labourer is treated as one simply of money; whereas the money consideration is one of the very least importance.

Finally, should things come to the worst, farmers might employ their own sons to a greater extent than at present. The sons of farmers cannot all be farmers; and it is quite as honourable to work on the land as in a shop or an office—it is quite as honourable, quite as useful, quite as pleasant, and quite as healthy; it is a position of far more independence, and it is quite compatible with the highest culture, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual. And should necessity call for it, farmers' daughters might assist in the farming operations. There is nothing undignified or degrading in the daughters of landholders making hay, milking cows, attending to poultry, and making up butter. It is quite as honourable, and in all respects quite as worthy an occupation as some other engagements which are usually thought proper for ladies. And, moreover, these occupations are quite compatible with riding on horseback, and playing the piano. Hitherto this course has been

unnecessary to its full extent. Farmers have been able to pay, or at least they have paid, other people to do work, and consequently employment has been given to a large number of labourers who would otherwise have been unemployed. But farming operations are quite worthy the attention of the sons and daughters of farmers; though, in the estimation of some, they may not be dignified enough for agricultural labourers.

From all these considerations it is evident that, in a pecuniary sense, farmers have nothing to fear, eventually, from the movement now going on. Though the whole movement is much to be deplored, there is strong reason to believe that it will be made to conduce to results, both material and moral, beneficial alike to farmer and labourer.

The question of the intelligence of the agricultural labourer is one of which great capital has been made. Much might be said on this point; but happily the question is now settled. It is now acknowledged that on this question people have been mistaken. People have at length found out that the agricultural labourer is not the stupid idiot he has been represented. And the only remark we need make, is that some day or another they will awake to the fact that his material position has been as unfairly represented as his mental abilities have.

It is not respecting the agricultural labourer alone that these statements have been made. Hardly a decade has passed since the same things were said about farmers; indeed, they have scarcely ceased to be said at the present day. And, all classes connected with the land have been subject to the same kind of representation.

The claims of the town population to such extraordinary intelligence and superiority are by no means new to us;

they have been long and loudly put forward; and they strongly remind us of that feeling of the ancient Greeks, who, under a deep sense of humility and of their own unimportance, used to speak of all nations but themselves as "barbarians." The urbane expressions which have been made use of are still fresh in our memories. Crowned with the immortal sentence, "The Lords are a stupid party," a stream of sweet abuse has descended on all classes connected with the land. We still have sounding in our ears, with true urban ring, such terms as "Stupid" Lords, "Ignorant" Squires, "Clodhopping" farmers, and "Down-trodden" agricultural labourers. And the same feeling has been expressed in many ways.

Far be it from us to wish to pluck one leaf from the palm of honour which justly belongs to others. Doubtless our town friends are our superiors, especially in intelligence. It would be invidious in us to doubt it, for we have it on the highest authority—they say so themselves, therefore it must be true.

And into such a low state are we fallen, that we have not even the desire to rise to the level of these self-styled intelligent people. We confess (to our shame be it said), but we frankly confess that we have not the desire to imitate such outbursts of intelligence as have been exhibited by Hyde Park rioters, Trafalgar Square mobs, and Paris Communists, Trades Unions, Reform Leagues, and Fenian Associations. We willingly leave to others the glory of these acts, content that they may be crowned with all the honour which such deeds of intelligence can bestow upon them.

Strange it is, that even now people fail to see that this insane opposition to everything and everybody connected

with the land, which has been exhibited by some sections of the people, is telling with fearful odds against themselves. And there are strong indications that such is the case; there are strong indications that their policy has been suicidal—as a narrow policy of seclusion always must be. Surely, if those things which have been said about agriculturists had been true, it would even then have been better for people to have made to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. It is marvellous that there should have been this feeling; as though to be connected with the land were the deepest disgrace.

But, notwithstanding the reproach, some people have stuck to the land, through evil report, and without good report, content with its small profits; and these are, perhaps, now more truly rich than many who have despised the land and sought more lucrative engagements. Farmers, at all events, cannot be unconscious of this, that though they have not much money, they have many things which tend to make life joyous and happy: and in this respect are, perhaps, more favourably circumstanced than many with more money.

The past will leave bitter memories, but better times are at hand; the future is bright with hope for agriculture, and, if farmers have the wisdom to stick to the land in times of prosperity as they have stuck to it in times of adversity, they will reap a good reward. They have no reason to fear for the future: for no change that is likely to be made can injure them. And, after all, people must eventually come to the land. With a rapidly increasing population this is inevitable.

We have already referred to signs of hope of an improvement in public opinion respecting the agricultural labourer.

And, even now, people are beginning to find out that because a man has the misfortune to be born a lord or a squire, he is not of necessity either "stupid" or "ignorant." Perhaps they will find out some day that it is possible for a farmer to have his common senses. And the time may come when even the agricultural labourer will not allow himself to be maligned with impunity.

It remains only for us to notice one other point.

The strike of the agricultural labourers was applauded. The news was received with joy, and heralded through the country—the long-wished-for movement had come. But when the London gasmen were wicked enough to strike, the deed was unbearable. It was beyond all endurance that London should be without gas for a few nights—but it is quite unimportant whether the harvest is got in next summer; and, as for the farmers, they deserve to lose their crops. As though other people would not suffer too! And, why farmers deserve this, we cannot say.

The very people who had before supported the working classes, and urged them on, turned round when the strike came home to themselves. The very newspapers changed their tone when their own interests were touched.

The same fact was true in the case of the South Wales colliery strike. Where were the "friends" of the working men in the time of their trouble? Where were the men who had patted the working men on the back? Where were the newspapers which had courted the working men?

And the same will be the case with agricultural labourers. This great friendship which has been suddenly professed for agricultural labourers will cease as soon as the fervour of political action has passed away, or as soon as a time of trial comes. There is this source of satisfaction: the

agricultural labourer will be true to the farmer, as the farmer will be true to the landlord; they are a compact three-fold cord: and a three-fold cord is not easily broken. But if some agricultural labourers should be so led away as to depend on their new friends, they will presently find themselves left in the lurch. They will soon be at a discount again. A permanent amalgamation cannot be expected by them with people by whom they have hitherto been caricatured and misrepresented, and who, even now, have hardly learned to speak of them without some term of reproach—some sobriquet or nickname.

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